



West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY 2020

PRESS RELEASE

In 1999, the United Nations adopted August 12 as the International Youth Day (IYD), following recommendations made by the World Conference of Youth Ministers. International Youth Day provides an opportunity for recognizing and promoting youth as positive agents of change, as well as key actors relevant to the attainment of sustainable peace and development in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In Africa, young people continue to demonstrate ingenuity, innovations and skills through various ventures embarked on in their communities. These include but are not limited to areas of agriculture, entrepreneurship, vocational skills and technology. These innovations¹ range from: the development of mobile application for autonomous irrigation of farms in Cameroon, the use of drones for area mapping, virtual tours and remote farms management in Cote d'Ivoire, the transformation of plastic waste into eco-friendly and durable paving stones and floor slabs in Morocco, the introduction of solar taxis in Ghana, as well as other initiatives in strengthening democracy, peace and development through community service, conflict prevention initiatives, blogging and other online activism options across the region. Without a doubt, it is evident that youth creativity can be harnessed for accelerated national development. In spite of this, the continuous portrayal of young people as agents of violence and insecurity has contributed gravely to the continued marginalization of youth in communities across the region despite their agency and valuable contributions to peace and development.

The theme of the 2020 International Youth Day, “**Youth Engagement for Global Action**” seeks to “highlight the ways in which the engagement of young people at the local, national and global levels is enriching national and multilateral institutions and processes, as well as draw lessons on how their representation and engagement in formal institutional politics can be significantly enhanced”.

In the wake of COVID-19 young people in West Africa in particular, have through various innovations and engagements contributed to mitigating the spread of COVID-19 in their individual countries. We therefore use the opportunity of #IYD2020 not only to recognize efforts made by the youth and young people in this fight, but also to urge all relevant actors to lend their support in fulfillment of the common good.

¹ <http://africa3535.com/2019-en>

Since December 2019, the world has been experiencing a global pandemic, the novel coronavirus, which has affected all regions of the world, including West Africa. As of August 7th, 2020, latest figures² stand at 148,061, the number of positive cases, 116,799, the number of recovered and 2,320, the number of deaths. The pandemic has affected many people, including youth with disruption in their education, loss of businesses and jobs. Despite this situation, young people have played key roles in fighting the pandemic. From providing food palliatives and protectives equipment to vulnerable populations, to public sensitizations and online awareness creation in almost all the countries in the region, young people have demonstrated their commitment and civic engagement. In Ghana for instance, in addition to manning of borders to prevent or control illegal entry into the country, young people have showcased innovation skills by inventing an automated and mobile solar-powered washing basin to limit the spread of the pandemic³. Similar innovation skills have been demonstrated in Benin with the development of an online self-checking and awareness creation application⁴.

As we are celebrating the IYD 2020, the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) is launching a 14-day campaign dubbed **“Change the Narrative and Status Quo”** to promote youth positive contribution in society, as a strategy to change the negative narrative and the status concerning them. Focusing on the theme **“ COVID- 19 and Youth Contribution to the Fight against the Pandemic in West Africa”**, and targeting primarily youth organizations beneficiaries of WANEP’s work across the region, the campaign will specifically aim to highlight positive roles of youth in the global efforts to limit the spread of the pandemic.

WANEP is therefore calling on youth and youth led organizations in West Africa, to join the campaign by participating in various activities by its National Networks throughout the 14 days, starting from August 12. WANEP also invites youths to like, retweet and spread the word across various online platforms.

Together, we can change the Narrative and Status Quo!

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² <http://www.oecd.org/swac/coronavirus-west-africa/>

³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/09/africa/ghana-coronavirus-handwash/index.html>

⁴ <http://gamifikathon.mystrikingly.com/>
